178 progressing almost imperceptibly. The transformation would seem to be as rapid as the previous immobility was fixed.

Let us try to discover the causes which may account for this extraordinary stagnation.

176 178 All are agreed in bearing witness to the fact that the state of civilisation in which Europeans found the Bantu tribes of South Africa is of an extremely ancient date. It is true that we have but little historical data to go upon as regards the development of these people, but, nevertheless, it seems to me highly probable that the shape of their ngula, their hwama, their shirundju, their pillows, the construction of their huts, dates from a very remote antiquity, and has been handed down unchanged from generation to generation. How are we to account for this lack of development, whilst the Indo-European races, starting probably from similar primitive conditions, have advanced to so high a degree of civilisation as that of the Greeks and Romans, and ultimately to that of modern times?

The reply given by many casual observers to this question is that *the Bantu races are incapable of progress.* They are condemned, by reason of their mental and spiritual constitution, to vegetate in perpetual barbarism or to make themselves ridiculous by a servile imitation of the superior races. This view is not justified by the facts of the case. We recognise a relative mental inferiority in the Thongas, as in their congeners the Bantus, but their minds, nevertheless, possess in a more or less rudimentary state, all those faculties of which we are wont to boast. During the several years I have passed in close contact with these intellects, supposedly so limited, I have been more often struck with the points of analogy between the Africans and ourselves than by the differences which separate us. Besides, it is an error to assert that they have not progressed. Their inventive genius is fully proved by the various ways in which the several tribes have taken advantage of the materials with which Nature has supplied them. The Ba-Ronga do not make their baskets in the same way as the Zulus, or the Ba-Sutho. Again, in many separate instances, we can note a distinct forward movement in their industry; the arrival of glass beads,

137 314 [illegible] (With regard to the name of the rubber tree, compare *Delagoa Bay, its Natives and Natural History*, London, Philip and Son, 1891, written by Mrs Monteiro, an Englishwoman who spent several years in Lourenço Marques and published interesting observations on the country. Without claiming any special scientific value, this volume affords much interesting information.)

one or two hundred years ago, gave birth to an entirely new and original decorative art; during the last century, the contact with a tribe better clothed than themselves led them to adopt a different and more decent costume. (Compare "Introduction à la Grammaire ronga" § XXXI.) When copper and brass wire became procurable, they not only made pretty bracelets, but invented quite a new art, the weaving of belts,

176 178

[415]

Phot. Doutre.

Manual work at the Lemana Training School (Northern Transvaal).

(p. 101 No. 1), egg-cups, and cups of various forms very different from those of European make.

The ability of the Native to progress in industry cannot be doubted when one sees the results of the industrial teaching they receive in many Missionary Institutions. The Swiss Romande Missionaries have introduced, in their schools, the manufacture of baskets and mats with the materials found in the country, and the results of the experiment have been altogether in favour of the intelligence of the Natives, as shown in the accompanying illustration. One of the pupils of Shiluvane even invented a new form of basket, made with a single leaf of a big palm tree [illegible] specimens [illegible] Shiluvane.

176 where carpentering and waggon building are scientifically taught,
178 the results are very satisfactory, and I myself saw at Lovedale a splendid American desk which had been made entirely by a Native, and was as perfect as if it had been manufactured by a European craftsman. So the industrial stagnation of the South African tribes must not be put down to an innate incapacity for progress. I think we must look elsewhere for its causes, and, without claiming to exhaust the question, I will proceed to enumerate the factors, which, to my mind, explain the exceedingly slow development of these tribes.

176 Their *political system, social and religious*, is one of the chief causes
178 of this state of things. The deceased chiefs are the gods of the nation.
183 Whatever they did should be done now; their lives are the supreme examples to be followed; the traditions handed down by their ancestors are the only religious and moral guides which these people possess. Customs which have come down from prehistoric times are law. No one would think of abandoning them. To do otherwise than others do, *psa yila*, is forbidden. It would be a denial of the divine authority of the ancestors, and a danger to the tribe. This principle is most strictly maintained in such tribes as are the freest from foreign admixture and the least exposed to outside influences. In the Khosen country, for example, when an evangelist trained in Spelonken, Yosefa, wanted to build a square house, he was prevented from doing so. It was against the law. How could he expect to live in a hut of a different shape from those his forefathers had inhabited? Had there been no Whites in the country, Yosefa would have found it impossible to build a house to his liking! This is a typical case of the immobility of Native industry (1).

But in advancing as a reason for this immobility the all-powerful sway of custom, supported and maintained by the national authorities, we have only pushed the difficulty further back. How has it been possible to maintain such a system of oppression? How is it that no stronger minded individuals have arisen to throw off this yoke and gain liberty of action, stirring up the tribe, in spite of itself, from the lethargy in which it is plunged, like an organism with its blood congealed!

(1) The lack of imagination in these races seems specially noticeable in mechanics, and it has been remarked that South African Natives have not yet invented a single machine. This may be true. However, I heard it attested by a Johannesburg technician that the Thongas have a real aptitude for running engines and a real bent for mechanics. As not one of them has ever studied advanced mathematics, no wonder they have not invented new machines.

Amongst our own races, men of genius, great thinkers, have, from the earliest times, been able to impress their new ideas upon the masses, and lead them eventually, however recalcitrant, upon the march of progress. We shall have to content ourselves with two considerations which may help to solve the problem. 176 178 183

Our civilisation is the result of a combination of millions of minds and hundreds of peoples. The lake-dweller, of the stone-age, was not much more developed than the present-day Black of South Africa: in some respects he was less so. But he inhabited Europe, and, to the South of that Continent, stretches an inland sea, the Mediterranean, which spreads out its many arms in gulfs and bays reaching to the very heart of the countries on its shores, and thus facilitates access between nation and nation. Every new discovery by one soon became the property of its neighbour. Rome inherited from Greece, and Greece from Egypt and Abyssinia, and these international relations, favoured by the geographical conditions of the Old World, explain the development, *the arithmetical progression* shall we call it, of our Indo-European civilisation. In Africa, nothing of the sort exists. Few, if any, gulfs or bays are to be found in this Continent, whose coasts are hopelessly unbroken and inhospitable. Many a long stretch of river, otherwise navigable, is closed to navigation by impassable cataracts. Deserts of burning sand separate the tribes from one another, and sometimes they are isolated by veritable ramparts of lofty mountains. Communication is almost impossible, and the Black tribe, left to its own resources, amidst natural surroundings of an enervating description, remains stationary and content with the elementary industry to which it has attained. *Outside influence is wanting* to stimulate the intellectual energy, the inventive faculty of which they possess the germs. 176 178

In addition to all this a second factor is noticeable in the course of human development, and this, while all in favour of the Indo-European races, accentuates still more forcibly the differences between the several branches of the human family. Through the centuries the Egyptian hieroglyphs slowly evolved into ideographic signs, which eventually gave place to the phonetic alphabet of the Phoenicians. This *alphabet* goes forth to conquer the world, and to give a fresh aspect to things in general. These twenty to thirty letters of which the Blacks had not the slightest notion, these signs, thanks to which stone, wood and paper have been made to speak, will henceforward allow great minds to transmit their thoughts direct to their fellow-men. The knowledge of one epoch will then be passed on intact to following generations,

176 whilst, formerly, ideas were frequently lost or distorted by popular
178 tradition ; progression will henceforth be not merely *arithmetical* but *geometrical*. The *book* will be the accumulator in which the intellectual forces of the race will be stored for future transmission, without wastage, prolific of light and stimulus to every sphere of human
[212] activity. The Blacks of South Africa have never invented any system of writing. The idea of representing an object, a number, a thought, or a sound by any conventional sign, seems never to have occurred to them. Makhani, Muzila's old counsellor, did not know his own age. He probably thought, in common with many of his contemporaries, that he was at least ten years old. One day I said to him : "Why didn't you go each year, when the leaves begin to appear on the trees, and make some kind of a mark on the bark of a nkuhlu? Then, to-day, you could have counted all the marks and you would know how old you are!" He laughed and considered the idea futile, absurd! The absence of any system of writing is, doubtless, the proof of a certain intellectual inferiority, but environment may easily account for the illiterate condition of the Natives. In fact it is environment which is the chief cause of their centuries-long stagnation.

It would, however, be doing a wrong to these people, were we to judge them solely by the absence of industrial progress. Mental activity is not manifested only in the manufacture of machinery or in the transactions of high finance. Man is a being endowed with thought and speech. Speech and literature, which reflect thought, are phases of human activity more essential than industrial undertakings. The Thongas, in common with their neighbours the Ba-Sutho and the Zulus, do most certainly possess a literature, although they have no system of writing and may be classed as illiterates ; of this fact I shall furnish abundant proof when treating of their *literary and artistic life*.